



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

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Contact: *CI-HQ-COMMUNICATIONSEDUCATION@ci.irs.gov
IRS – Criminal Investigation

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Owner of Costa Rican Call Center Sentenced to Nine Years in Prison for Defrauding Elderly through Sweepstakes Scam

A dual U.S.-Costa Rican citizen was sentenced yesterday to 108 months in prison for his role in a \$1.88 million sweepstakes fraud scheme that victimized hundreds of elderly U.S. residents, announced Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department's Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Jill Westmoreland Rose of the Western District of North Carolina.

Geoffrey Alexander Ramer, 36, formerly of Falls Church, Virginia, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Max O. Cogburn Jr. of the Western District of North Carolina. Ramer was also ordered to pay \$2,871,430.35 in restitution and to forfeit \$1,886,018.

On Sept. 15, 2014, Ramer pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, eight counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering and four counts of international money laundering in connection with the telemarketing fraud scheme.

According to the plea documents, from 2008 through December 2013, Ramer owned and operated call centers located in Costa Rica. Ramer admitted that he and his co-conspirators called U.S. residents, many of whom were elderly, and falsely informed the victims that they had won a substantial cash prize in a sweepstakes, and that, in order to receive their prize money, the victims were to send money to Costa Rica for a purported refundable insurance fee. After receiving the victims' money, the co-conspirators would contact the victims to falsely inform them that the prize amount had increased and the victims needed to send additional money for more purported fees, Ramer admitted. According to the plea, Ramer and his co-conspirators would continue these attempts to collect additional money until the victims went broke or discovered the fraud. Ramer admitted that he and his co-conspirators utilized VoIP phones that displayed a Washington, D.C., area code in order to conceal that they were calling from Costa Rica, and sometimes falsely claim to be from a U.S. federal agency to give victims a false sense of security. The co-conspirators kept the victims' funds, never provided any winnings to the victims and used the funds to continue the call centers' operation and for the co-conspirators' personal benefit, Ramer admitted.

Plea documents state that, along with his co-conspirators, Ramer was responsible for causing more than \$1.88 million in losses to hundreds of elderly Americans.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Homeland Security are investigating

the case. Senior Litigation Counsel Patrick M. Donley and Trial Attorney William H. Bowne of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case.

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